

Introduction to Community Asset Mapping

Working Paper 2026-04

Irshad Altheimer, Ph.D.,
Ellen M. Granberg Endowed Full Professor | Department of Criminal Justice
Director, Center for Public Safety Initiatives
Rochester Institute of Technology
ixagcj@rit.edu

Ava Douglas
Research Assistant | Center for Public Safety Initiatives
aid4232@rit.edu

Venita D'Angelo
Research Associate | Center for Public Safety Initiatives
vcdgcj@rit.edu

Introduction

As cities like Rochester, New York, grapple with problems such as violence, poverty, and homelessness, community members find themselves searching for the help they need to succeed. Community asset mapping allows researchers to determine and analyze the violence reduction and prevention resources within a city. By doing so, an anti-violence ecosystem can be elucidated, and a concrete support network for the community can be formally established.

An overview of asset mapping

Asset mapping is a tool that allows one to pinpoint the various resources within a community. Asset mapping is defined by the California Department of Social Services as “. . . a process whereby a community’s assets are specifically identified, described, and often (but not always) visualized geographically on a map” (CDSS, n.d.). The process of asset mapping begins with an assessment of community needs. Upon identification, an asset map is deployed to highlight all the pertinent resources, e.g., housing or food, allowing the community to mitigate social issues within the community. Asset mapping is a powerful tool because it empowers communities to take advantage of the resources at their disposal, whilst also highlighting what other resources the community would benefit from (Lightfoot et al., 2014).

Examples of different types of assets

Extant literature identifies that communities often have several tangible and intangible assets present (Lightfoot et al., 2014). Tangible assets may include access to skilled individuals

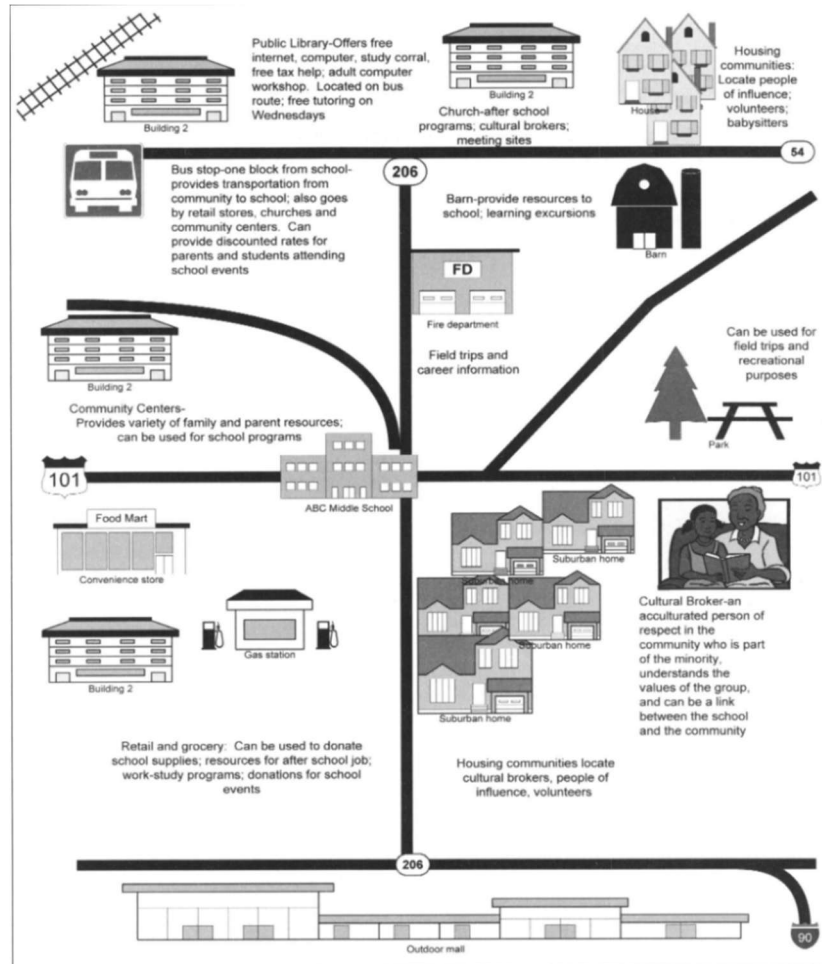
(e.g., social workers and healthcare professionals) or community organizations and institutions (e.g., universities and public schools). Intangible assets may include cultural traditions and/or social networks.

Our research involves creating a community asset map with the purpose of identifying organizations that directly or indirectly involve themselves in violence prevention. Assets are further broken down into three categories based on where in the anti-violence ecosystem they intervene. Primary assets/interventions are in place before violence occurs and are typically community-based. Secondary assets/interventions typically engage immediately after a violent event. Tertiary assets/interventions are focused on long-term violence prevention.

An example of a community asset map

A well-articulated example of a community asset map can be seen in Griffin & Farris' (2010) community asset map for school counselors. Griffin and Farris (2010) show how a community asset map could be used to locate and determine resources available to students within the community. They highlighted that, ideally, school counselors who want to employ an asset map put together a multidisciplinary team to research assets in the community. After a list is created, the team would contact the organizations to ensure they have up-to-date information about what each asset can offer students. Figure 1 shows Griffin & Farris' asset map illustration.

Figure 1.



Although this community asset map does not pertain to community violence, it is an effective illustration of how an asset map can be utilized. The infographic shows where the organizations and businesses in the community are and the services they could provide for students. It is clear to see how this map could be used by school counselors searching for services for a student in need. Similarly, an asset map could be used to pinpoint resources available to violence victims within a community.

An asset map for a community-based hub for violence victims

The ultimate goal of our research is to develop a successful community-based hub for violence victims that would be supported by various organizations in the area. Faith-based institutions, youth-centered organizations, street outreach workers, and many more, would come together to support a hub that would meet the various needs of violence victims. By creating a community asset map of Rochester, we will visualize the current anti-violence ecosystem and learn about what kinds of resources exist and can contribute to a community-based hub.

A CERV case study

Community Engagement to Reduce Victimization (CERV) is an organization that connects with individuals following their victimization and seeks to support participants in a holistic way that ultimately prevents retaliation. Despite CERV's intervention, navigating formal institutional systems as a violence victim can be a challenge.

The following case study is the account of a CERV participant named Anna. Anna was standing in her front yard with five children, two of them being her own. A car drove by Anna's house and started shooting. A bullet shot through Anna's right foot and became stuck in her left foot. Anna called 911, and her first touchpoint was with the paramedics from the ambulance.

The ambulance did come and tell me that I didn't get shot, that I got grazed. I didn't need to go to the hospital, and they just wrapped my foot up.

As Anna recounts above, when the ambulance arrived, the paramedics inspected her injuries and determined that Anna did not get shot; her foot was only grazed, and she just needed

bandages.

I walked around for two hours. It happened at 8:00. I didn't get to the hospital until 10:00 by a private vehicle because I didn't know I got shot until I got in the emergency. As soon as they looked at my foot, they was like, "Oh yeah, you have a bullet. It went through."

Anna explains that, following her victimization, she spent two hours walking around on her injured foot, which the paramedics assured her had just been grazed. It was not until later in the evening that Anna could not push through the pain anymore, and she traveled to the hospital in a private vehicle. At the hospital, the healthcare professionals determined that she had been shot, and the bullet was still lodged in her left foot.

Anna's experience with healthcare professionals illustrates a touchpoint that could have gone smoother, had the abilities of a community hub been utilized. A community-based hub would house professionally trained trauma-informed first responders who focus on treating violence victims. These paramedics would have thoroughly inspected Anna's injuries and sent her to the hospital for surgery. It is possible that Anna's paramedics were biased against her and/or were rushing through their visit because they had other calls to respond to. A community-based hub would deploy first responders dedicated to victims of violence who can take their time and focus on the victims they are treating.

Anna also recounts how law enforcement played a role in her lack of medical care.

They told the detectives on the scene. They told the officers on the scene that I was not shot, that I was grazed. All she had to do was clean it and wrap it up. That's what she did. She did get the white gauze and she wrapped my right foot up, but she didn't do nothing to the left foot.

At the scene, the paramedics informed law enforcement that Anna had just been grazed by the bullet and did not need to go to the hospital. While law enforcement officers are usually not trained in healthcare, they should still be thoroughly advocating for the victim. In this

situation, the officers took the paramedics' word as the truth and did not advocate further for Anna. Ideally, a community-based hub would have victim advocates who arrive on the scene and work with law enforcement officials to make sure that the victim is receiving the best care available.

When Anna arrived at the hospital, the doctor who examined her could not believe that the paramedics had diagnosed her wounds as grazes, as she could see entrance and exit wounds in Anna's feet. X-rays showed bullet fragments throughout the inside of her right foot and the whole bullet inside her left foot. Anna underwent surgery to remove the bullet and the fragments.

Anna is not a medical or law enforcement official, and she had never been shot before. She put her trust in the professionals to take care of her health and safety, and they did not. It can be difficult for victims to advocate for their needs, especially in the immediate aftermath of victimization, and that is why a community-based hub that could deploy trauma-informed, victim-focused officials is necessary.

Following Anna's release from the hospital, she describes how her family has yet to return to their house.

We never been back to our house since that happened. We left [that] night and I walked literally around the corner 'cause my son's girlfriend lives around the corner from us.

Since Anna and her family were victimized in the front yard of their home, they felt too unsafe to go back. Anna is a single mom with six kids who is on disability and is not receiving much help from the county following her victimization, which is making her pay \$1,400 for a ten-day stay at a hotel. She connected with CERV, but CERV has limited resources for providing

victims with housing as they are focused on meeting immediate, short-term needs. They were able to pay for a few nights in a hotel before handing Anna off to the Department of Social Services.

Anna's six kids are scattered around. Her three youngest children are staying in the hotel with her, the oldest is with his girlfriend, and one of her older daughters is with Anna's mother. Since the family is still receiving threats, it is still not safe for them to go home.

Anna's struggle with finding temporary housing for her family is an example of why a community-based hub is needed. The ideal hub would have temporary housing provisions and/or be connected with organizations that can provide free/subsidized temporary housing for victims. The hub would also offer services to help the victim search for a new home if they want to permanently relocate. Securing housing is a significant challenge for victims and those working to support victims. A community-based hub has the potential to help overcome this challenge.

Another significant issue that Anna's family is facing is the concern that her daughter is not going to school.

My daughter haven't been in school for a month because the guys that shot me is in the same school as her. She haven't been back to school since this incident.

Anna's daughter feels too unsafe to go to school since the shooters are in her classes.

Because of this, she has been out of school for at least a month. Unfortunately, neither the police nor the school district seemed in any hurry to assist Anna with getting her daughter safely back in school. In the meantime, CERV is trying to utilize its connections within the school district to determine who can initiate the transfer process to another school for Anna's

daughter.

Although CERV's efforts are noteworthy, a community-based hub would benefit from an official partnership with the school district and law enforcement. Ideally, the hub would afford community members more of a voice in any administration of justice. To this end, it is arguable that Anna's daughter, as a victim, should not have to change schools. A community-based hub would employ victim advocates who would utilize the hub's formal partnership to advocate for Anna and her daughter as effectively as possible.

Eventually, law enforcement apprehended one of the boys responsible for the shooting. Anna expressed being scared about other members of their crew coming around and threatening or hurting her family. Anna shares her overall feeling about where her family is at now:

... there is no support...[should] have emergency shelter because of this situation, or get in the right support that we need outside... We should be able to get more support from the county when it's an emergency situation like this.

I keep hearing about a victim support system. It should be more where we shouldn't feel like we are the [suspects]. We're not the victims, we're the suspect. How I feel? I feel like I'm the suspect, like I committed a crime and I'm hiding out right now, and I'll have to pay this.

I'm suffering a lot when it comes to my kids because we starting fresh over, getting transportation, getting back and forth to school. It's a lot.

Anna's story is not unique. Violence victims across Rochester are experiencing difficulties while trying to navigate the institutions standing in their way. Through community asset mapping, all the available resources and services for violence victims can be identified and located. This asset map will act as the foundation for the creation of a trauma-informed, victim-centered community hub that could support violence victims following their victimization by attending to all their needs.

References

- California Department of Social Services (CDSS). (n.d.). *Asset mapping / strength and needs assessment (toolkit)*. CDSS Programs – FFPSA Part IV: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/ffpsa-part-iv/asset-mapping-strength-and-needs-assessment-toolkit#:~:text=Asset%20mapping%20is%20a%20process,the%20needs%20of%20a%20community>.
- Griffin, D., & Farris, A. (2010, June). School counselors and collaboration: Finding resources through community asset mapping. *Professional School Counseling*, 13(5), 248–256. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42732958>
- Lightfoot, E., McCleary, J. S., & Lum, T. (2014). Asset mapping as a research tool for community-based participatory research in social work. *Social Work Research*, 38(1), 59–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24899181>

About the Center for Public Safety Initiatives

The Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI) is a multi-disciplinary research center that examines strategies to reduce crime and enhance the administration of justice. It provides program evaluation, data analytics, and project management services to area law enforcement, community non-profits, and other criminal justice professionals, and it contributes to general knowledge generation of the nature and causes of crime and violence. Its educational goals include training graduate and undergraduate students in strategic planning, program evaluation, and policy analysis.

The foundation of the Center is the practice of action research in which relevant data and analyses are brought to bear on the day-to-day decision-making processes of organizations. The Center serves the practice of policy development and implementation in real time and is a testing ground for 21st century university engagement, demonstrating how rigorous research and analysis can play a role in improving the lives of society's most marginalized citizens.

To access our full library of white papers, visit our website at rit.edu/cpsi.



Learn more

- rit.edu/cpsi
- CPSI@rit.edu
- (585) 475-6386